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AUTHOR Owens, Otis Holloway
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ABSTRACT

The ways in which workshops and seminars can be used to promote the participation and advancement of women and minorities in the field of educational research are described, based on the activities of Project Growth, sponsored by The University of Alabama's Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS). The program has served predoctoral and postdoctoral participants who are in residence at IHERS, or who are either employed and/or attending graduate school. Among the project objectives are to provide mentors and role models who can advise participants about gaining access to essential communication channels in educational research, and to provide advice concerning specific research efforts. The following tactics have been implemented to achieve the project objectives: applicants are asked to explain their research interests, skills, and goals; a contract is developed between the project and the participant; the project emphasizes both professional skill development and human skill development; scholars are carefully matched with top level university administrators for practice interviews designed to give the scholars experience of presenting themselves to an administrator and to promote information exchange; events such as breakfast and lunch meetings/panels, and social hours are sponsored to encourage interaction among scholars, university faculty and administrators, IHERS staff, speakers, and advisory board members; scholars are provided special opportunities to talk about their research ideas in small groups, to present their proposals as members of a panel, and to give formal presentations of their research progress or findings as guest speakers; and the content of the workshops is established by themes that focus on both national and regional issues. (SW)

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Workshops and Seminars and the Demystification of Educational Research*

Otis Holloway Owens**

Project Growth, a developmental research program for women and members of minority groups, was designed to increase, ultimately, the participation of women and minorities in educational research and to provide opportunities for project participants to contribute in a meaningful way to educational research. The Project, initiated in 1978 and funded in part by a grant from the Women and Minorities Program, National Institute of Education, is sponsored by The University of Alabama's Institute of Higher Education Research and Services (IHERS).

Comprehensive in scope, the program serves a total of 27 scholars. Of this number, 2 pre-doctoral and 2 post-doctoral scholars are in residence at IHERS. Other persons designated as Special Scholars are either employed and/or attending graduate school. Five Special Scholars are also post doctorates.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss ways in which workshops and seminars, basic activities of Project Growth,

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**Associate and Co-Director of Project Growth, Institute of Higher Education Research and Services, The University of Alabama.

have been used to achieve the following objectives:

*to provide opportunities for scholars to experience both personal and professional growth.

*to provide mentors and role models who can advise participants about gaining access to essential communication channels in educational research.

*to arrange situations for participants to obtain advice on the application of concepts and methods from relevant scholarly fields and disciplines to strengthen their educational research skills.

*to ensure the participation of minority persons and women in planning and participating in seminars as well as the total project.

The series of twelve three-day seminars was designed to cover a span of three years, being held at intervals of approximately 90 days. To date, eight seminars have been completed.

Recognizing the complexity of specific problems that commonly restrict participation and advancement of women and minorities in the field of educational research, we have attempted to structure a multi-faceted workshop model which would encourage personal and professional growth and foster opportunity to conduct research. An integral aspect of each workshop is the inclusion of minority persons and women as part of the program.

Too often workshops and seminars can become overworked educational tools. Project Growth, however, has introduced

a number of innovative methods to achieve the previously enumerated objectives. They include:

Involvement with the workshops and seminars begins with the application process when applicants are encouraged to use the process as a learning experience. In addition to the usual demographic data, the applicant is requested to provide two written statements. In the first, the applicants explain their research interests, strengths, weaknesses, and skills possessed and desired. They then describe their short- and long-term career goals and how they perceive the scholar program might advance these goals.

A two-part contract forms the basis for interaction between the Project and Participant. A letter notifying individuals of their designation as scholars also stipulates the terms and conditions of the award. After the applicant accepts the award in writing then a Personal and Professional Growth contract is developed by the Scholar with the assistance of project staff.

Human-potential-development is a vital element of the Project. The distinctiveness of the IHERS program lies in its emphasis upon growth experiences of both a personal and professional nature for emerging leaders in educational research. Believing that professional skill development must be accompanied by human skill development, the directors have planned to include various segments of a structured human-

potential-development process as organized by James P. McHolland.

A Practice Information Interview has been the basis for significant interaction and learning. Scholars carefully matched with top level university administrators engage in structured interviews. The interviews accomplish three purposes. They give scholars the experience of presenting themselves to an administrator and of explaining their strengths and weaknesses; they give scholars an opportunity to learn how individuals with similar training and experiences are now utilized within a major university; and they provide scholars with information about how persons with particular interests and skills in research might be employed in the future.

As a result of this strategy, project participants have not only become better acquainted with the range and scope of available and projected work opportunities within the higher education community, but also key administrators have become more knowledgeable of Project Growth and the quality of its scholars. Contacts between scholars and administrators lead to future contacts and subsequent mentor relationships.

The development of collegial relationships is fostered through planned events which encourage interaction among scholars, university faculty members and administrators, Institute staff, seminar and workshop presenters, and advisory board members. The format for these events range from breakfast meetings, brunch speakers, luncheon panels, and social hours to picnic lunches, banquets, and cocktail hours.

Scholars' presentation of their research begins with the idea and proposal stages. Since visibility is perceived as a vital ingredient within the research community (Epstein, 1979; Valverde, 1980), the workshops and seminars programs seek to prepare scholars for the day when they will present their research for publication and to professional associations. Funds are made available for these purposes.

Within the "safe" community of the workshop, scholars are provided special opportunities to talk about their research ideas in small groups. Then they present their research proposals as members of a panel. Finally, they give formal and individual presentations of their research progress or findings as guest speakers. In the course of the Scholars' Presentations, the participants receive an evaluation of their work from other scholars, special faculty consultants, and IHERS staff. In addition, through the workshops, scholars also evaluate and critique the work of other scholars. On a voluntary basis, scholars assume major leadership roles in planning, organizing, and conducting workshops. Workshop VI represents the work of a committee of scholars.

Individual consultations are used to strengthen research skills and techniques. Faculty members, Institute staff, and research specialists serve as consultants to individual scholars in assisting them to develop their research ideas into proposals and ultimately into written reports. This single feature of individual instruction provides a means by which the individual research needs of the scholars can be met.

The content of the workshops is established by themes which focus on both national and regional issues. Specific research methods and skills needed to carry out a given research project are also included as topical items during the events of the workshops. Scholars are guided through an examination of the designated topics for research ideas and possibilities. In some cases the minds of scholars are stretched to explore new ideas. Hopefully, even familiar ideas are viewed from a fresh perspective. Very carefully chosen workshop consultants are also invited to share with the group their personal pathways to present positions and current intellectual inquiries.

Commentary

The workshop accomplishments may never be adequately measured since scholars continue to receive assistance through the project throughout the year and between workshop meetings. There are, however, certain aspects of the workshop experience that scholars have noted as especially meaningful to the progress of their research efforts.

For example during the series of workshops, scholars have been exposed to outstanding researchers in the field. A luncheon meeting with Ralph Tyler afforded scholars the opportunity to share ideas with a nationally prominent educational researcher. Scholars interested in investigating the impact of family and work upon female educational administrators invited sociologist Jessie Bernard to conduct several workshop sessions. Other scholars interested in research in the realm of educational equity invited Michael Olivas to address the topic of access and higher education. Eva Galombos spoke about access and the research agenda of the 1980s for the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). Robert Silverman, editor of the Journal of Higher Education, examined the processes and procedures, the pains and pleasures of publishing in scholarly journals.

As a result of their meeting and sharing research plans during the workshops and seminars with nationally prominent persons, scholars received the needed impetus and confidence to initiate mutually beneficial relationships in other settings.

For example a scholar whose area of research is the adult life cycle patterns sought out Arthur Chickering who now serves as her mentor.

Currently scholars are experiencing varying levels of research productivity. Most scholars have taken approximately two and a half years to reap the fruits of publishing. The presentation of papers to a professional association has emerged as a consistent prelude to submitting an article for publication. During the course of the project a total of ten papers have been presented by scholars including one presented to the 1980 AERA meeting. An increasing number of articles are now being written and submitted for publication. Articles have been accepted for publication in Journal of Lifelong Learning, Southern College Personnel Association Journal, Alabama Business, Psychological Reports, Housing and Society, Capstone Journal of Education and Alabama Alumni News.

While the quantity of articles published has been modest, qualitatively much of the research has been distinctive. Of particular note is the accomplishment of one scholar who won in national competition, the National Association of Women Deans and Counselors' Ruth Strang Research Award.

The workshops and seminars have formed a mini research community for scholars where they are made to feel a part of rather than estranged from the pursuit of educational research. Scholar accomplishments show that the workshops have removed the mystery and anxiety that once surrounded the formidable

area of educational research. At least for the Project Growth scholars, demystification is complete.

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